

the drinks business

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CREATING A STIR

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Trade talk: After all the interest in the technical specifications of different closures made from a range of materials, there's now a renewed interest in natural cork. Is this longstanding closure still the best solution?

NEAL HAGIWARA, DIRECTOR OF QUALITY AND TECHNICAL SERVICES, NEOCORK

"Due to the differing types of wine and planned shelf life, there is no single closure that is optimal for every condition to effectively deliver that best experience to the consumer. This is the reason why it should be the winemaker's choice to use the closure that is best suited to provide the consumer with the best experience. The closure must work synergistically with the wine that is bottled showing the least amount of variability and taint due to the closure in order to properly show the wine's merit. Therefore, all categories of closures are best when the quality of the closure doesn't interfere with the wine, has little variation and doesn't contribute to defects."

JIM RANKIN, MANAGING DIRECTOR, RANKIN BROTHERS & SONS

"With cork the offer is extensive; from agglomerate through medium to super premium quality natural corks, there is something to suit every buyer's budget. Mechanically, it is an ideal in bore closure particularly when faced with bottle to bottle variation. New technologies such as Aquamark and Nanocork prove that despite being a mature industry, the leading manufacturers continue to fund innovation and process improvement.

The arguments supporting cork's positive record on ecological and environmental matters are well rehearsed; many buyers are looking to cork to help them achieve their company's targets on carbon emissions and sustainability. As growers, we are seeking to validate our own record on sustainability by the adoption of the FSC standard; many others have done or are now doing the same. A 19% increase in wine cork sales during 2010 reflects a more robust offer from a newly invigorated and confident industry. I hope that we have turned a corner."

CARLOS DE JESUS, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, AMORIM

"Cork is definitely still the best closure solution. It has maintained a 70% market share for a reason. We are seeing something of a cork renaissance in the UK. It is both technically efficient and provides added value - wines under cork fetch higher prices at auction. The environment is also an issue - sustainability is only going to get more important, which will continue to underpin cork's success. We saw 14% value growth last year, which was our most successful result since we were founded. Plastic stopper companies are going

bankrupt as the business model doesn't make sense today, and both the screwcap and cork companies are benefiting from its demise. Wine is an aspirational product and carries an emotional charge."

JEFFREY SLATER, DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL MARKETING, NOMACORC

"Nomacorc believes there is no be-all-and-end-all closure for the wine industry. Several types of closures have existed alongside each other for years and they will continue to do so. Rather than investing in communications campaigns, we remain focused on innovation and research to better understand the impact of packaging and bottling on wine development. Most recently, we've applied our unmatched expertise in oxygen management and fault protection to launch the Select Series - our most innovative closure line to date. The very fact that traditional cork is natural, and thus inconsistent, presents winemakers with problems, not a solution. In addition, cork taint still hovers around an unacceptable 3%. Ultimately the wine experience is about the quality of wine, not the closures. If we are doing our job right, the closure should not be the focal point. Our ultimate goal is to steward to the consumer the discovery of a wine that tastes the way the winemaker intended."

RAHUL JAIN, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, VIPRA CLOSURES UK LTD

"It's unanimously accepted that screwcaps are increasingly gaining currency and popularity for being dynamic and truly functional. The advent of screwcaps has revamped the wine industry phenomenally. They are rescue agents for wine producers around the world as they enable the producer to save tremendously both on cost and wastage. Screwcaps are a panacea to all the concerns afflicting the wine industry. They can preserve the fruit or aromatic flavours in a wine efficiently, effectively contain rapid ageing, allow room for cosmetic experimentation through print decorations - a big brand propelling tool, and to cap it all they are wonderfully user-friendly. Consumer preference is turning towards screwcaps."

ULTIMATELY THE WINE EXPERIENCE IS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF WINE, NOT THE CLOSURE. IF WE ARE DOING OUR JOB RIGHT, THE CLOSURE SHOULD NOT BE THE FOCAL POINT

Trade talk (continued)

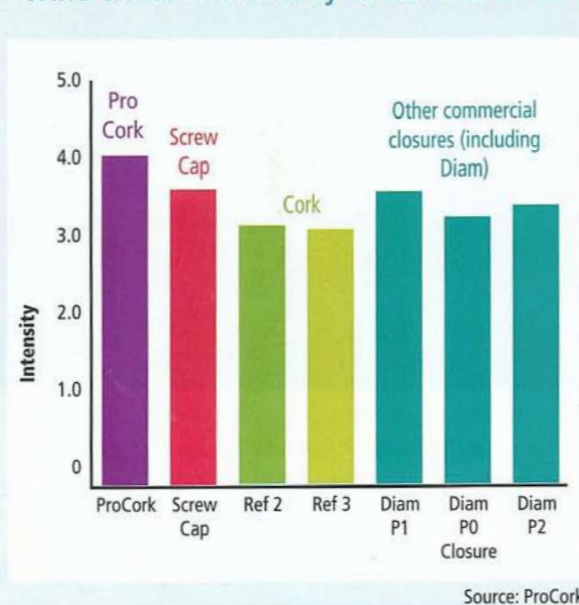
GREGOR CHRISTIE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, PROCORK

"ProCork began trials on alternative closures in the mid 1990s. We looked at different plastics, screwcaps, natural proteins, bees wax and other natural alternatives. The best wine in any trial was always under cork and so was the worst! The trials quickly highlighted that the rate oxygen entered the wine was the single most important controller of how the wine turned out. As our experiments started to investigate selectively permeable membranes to control the oxygen ingress and find an optimum, the gestation and birth of ProCork occurred. The permeability of ProCork sits lower than cork but higher than screw cap. Thereby avoiding both oxidation and reduction in the wine. The membrane is selective to oxygen so it stops bitter cork tannins, taints and excessive oxygen passing into the wine. The membrane is crystalline, almost glass like, so the winemakers are finding the wine more true and consistent.

In the AWRI Commercial Closure trial the ProCork wine kept the highest flavour levels and best balance of any of the closures. The graph is shown below for one of the flavours, citrus. The reason for the remarkable results is that the crystalline coating on the cork stops flavour scalping, which occurs into the cork, glue or plastic of other closures. It also stops the organic sulphur compounds of reduction masking the flavour. It also stops early oxidation from flattening the flavours.

In a nutshell, ProCork takes all the benefits of a natural environmental product and removes its inconsistencies and all the while hardly altering the product, just a thin skin albeit a bit high tech."

Wine closures: intensity of citrus aromas



A CORK YOU CAN TRUST! TCANT

The TCANT solution is breathtakingly simple.

It employs the finest natural cork and enhances it with a specially developed membrane technology. The result is a cork that actually controls the rate of oxygen entering the bottle. This allows the wine to elegantly soften and integrate the grape and oak tannins.

TCANT is a perfect hybrid of nature and technology. When customers see a TCANT come out of the bottle, they will know that the utmost care has been taken to produce and protect the wine.



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